

415

The round-bottomed three-legged iron pots (Figs. 5 and 34), of various sizes from the small porridge pot to the giant 18 gallon potato pot, are descended from the bronze cauldrons of which there are many specimens in the museums ranging in date from 700 B.C. to 1700 A.D. The cauldron was in old times the special property of the head of the house and figures prominently in Celtic mythology and folklore. The pot has been described as the "maid of all work," but boiling potatoes for man and beast is now its main task. The heaviest pots are going out of use with the introduction of raised grates.

Rush, Candle & Fire-Split Holders

354

373

416

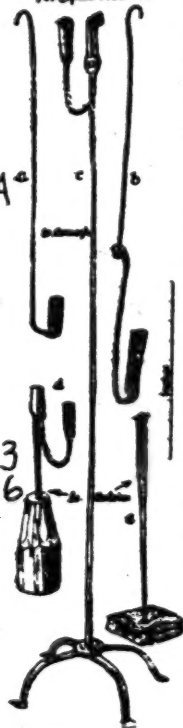
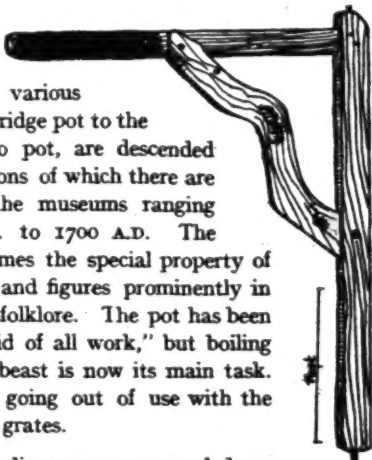


Fig. 37.

Wooden Crane
a. arm
Fig. 36.

These various appliances are suspended on the iron crook or adjustable pot hook, to which many different kinds of fittings or "books" (Fig. 35) can be attached. The crook may simply hang from a bar placed across the chimney, but more commonly from a crane (Fig. 29) which swivels at the side of the fire. A few examples of the wooden crane survive (Fig. 36). By the fireside, too, are kept the short iron tongs or "mudyees" and the heather besom (Fig. 29) which is more efficient than any broom in cleaning among the hearthstones. A goose-wing serves to dust the pots and clean the griddle when baking. Here by the fireside was hung the crusie oil lamp (Chapter 16, Fig. 105) which is another element of the north-western province of European folk-culture and may have its prototype in the famous "hanging bowls" of over 1,000 years ago. A selection of old-fashioned smith-made iron light-holders of different kinds is shown in Fig. 37. There are more elaborate styles, but the charm of these homely appliances lies in their simplicity. The upper figures from Co. Armagh (a and b) show weavers' candlesticks, made for suspension from the loom. Figure (e) is for holding a "split" or thin strip of resinous bog-fir. The others (c and d) are

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural Irish ER6

INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE 77

rush-light holders with attached candle-sockets. The dipped rushes were sometimes plaited together to make the light last longer. It is of interest to note that the war-time shortage of oil and candles has led to a revival of the use of rush-lights in some country districts. 373
416 ●

A great amount of interesting information might be collected about the food of the Irish peasantry, the methods of cooking, times of meals and the many customs and superstitions connected with food and drink. We may close this chapter with a few remarks about some foods other than bread. It is curious to reflect that the diet of some western districts, "potatoes for 10 months and Indian meal for two," is so largely dependent on crops of New World origin! Potatoes were made tasty with "kitchen" or "point," that is a bit of relish such as a salted herring; and in difficult times they were only half boiled so that the hard core, called the "moon" or "bone," might prolong the processes of digestion. In Ulster the name given to July was "the blue month" because it was a time of scarcity between the old potatoes and the new crop, but generally speaking milk products were consumed during the summer months. Meat, by which the countryman means beef, was often salted down and reserved for winter use, but meat eating tended to be restricted to certain seasons or festivals such as Christmas, Shrove and Easter. 262
[25]

Another seasonal food was the "sowens" or porridge made from soured "meal-seeds" sifted from the oatmeal. It was traditionally eaten at Hallowe'en; and the Irish name for the 1st of November is Samhain, or "Sowin." I have heard this dish nicknamed "water bewitched." The thin liquid resulting from steeping the fine meal-dust was also drunk and called "thewin," a substitute for buttermilk. A kind of whey ("troander") was made by mixing sweet milk and buttermilk, and "drammock" was a harvest drink consisting of raw oatmeal and water. Then there is the boxty bread made from potato flour and cooked on the griddle. Many traditional foods and drinks are now little more than memories and of some, for instance "heather beer," the country folk say that "the secret has been lost." But one might still [25]

netting in sea and lake and for poaching. And in this connexion one may whisper that the illegal eel-spear (Fig. 94), the leister or salmon spear, and the trout net (Fig. 96)¹ will sometimes be shown to the discreet inquirer. Old garden forks and shovels are often fashioned into spears by the smith. Resinous bog-fir sometimes provided the torches for "burning the river" in salmon-poaching. Much might be said of these dark practices, but this is not the place to give away all the secrets of the countryside. We may properly refer to the huge "legitimate" catches of eels in weirs such as those of "the fishy fruitful Bann."

The well-known curraghs of the Boyne and the west coast have recently been described in James Hornell's book, "British Coracles and Irish Curraghs," but details of rowing and sailing craft of all kinds should be recorded and sketched before regional types give way, as they are slowly doing, to standardised boats. It is probably not too much to say that every coastal county, every large river and lake, has its own traditional styles of vessels, and their comparative study would be an important contribution to science. Some of the small oval curraghs of the Boyne are still covered with cow-hide, but tarred canvas has taken its place in the larger sea-going curraghs of the west coast. These display many interesting variations according to local conditions and custom, but all, with the exception of the paddle curraghs of Tory Island, are fitted with single thole pins on which the oars swivel, the wooden pin passing through a hole in the heavy "bool" of the oar (Fig. 99). This curious device is employed also on some river and lake boats (e.g., the Corrib, the Shannon and Lough Neagh) and was until recent years found on the fishing boats of the Scotch Quarter at Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. I have no information on the distribution of the single thole-pin oar outside Ireland, except that Mr. Hornell has reported (in a letter) that the method is used in the Sudan on the Nile. It is true of such ethnographical studies [TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 150--ANALYST]

¹ Similar poaching nets were made in the Hebrides—and probably also in Ireland—of heather stems and even sedge roots (*Carex flacca*).

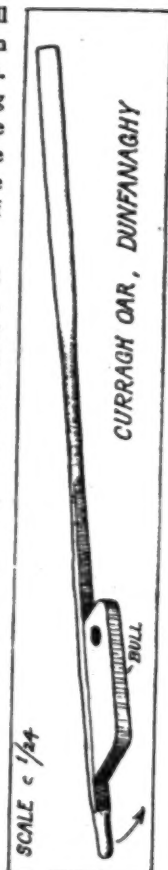


Fig. 99.

[416] ●

501

[824]

227

FURNITURE AND FITTINGS



FIG. 27. Light-holders. (1) Crusie, Co. Antrim (scale $\times 2$). (2) Fir-split holder, Co. Antrim. (3) Rush and candle-holder, Co. Antrim. (4) Weavers' candle-holder, Co. Armagh. (5) Hob lamp, Co. Cavan. (6) Scollop shell lamp, Aran Islands.

and by rush-lights held in iron pincers mounted on wooden or wrought-iron stands (Fig. 27). Candles of resin, tallow and beeswax were also made at home by dipping prepared strips of cloth repeatedly in an iron grisset and rolling out the candles on a board. Such candles played an important part in various

FURNITURE AND FITTINGS

church festivals and at wakes, and though they are now bought³⁵⁴ they are made by hand in a few towns by chandlers who carry³⁷³ on a medieval tradition. One Dublin firm, established in 1488, manufactures large church candles of beeswax by methods which³⁹⁴ can have changed little with the centuries. In the home the candles were supported in wrought-iron holders or stuck into a turf by the fireside. Tall standard holders, often with adjustable fittings, were designed to give light to the weaver at the loom,²⁸⁶ and they are most typically found in Ulster (Fig. 28). The fine embroidery which occupied the women in the linen districts must have imposed a great strain on the eyes: there are stories of a single candle serving as a central source of light for a ring of seamstresses, each of whom held her work against a⁴¹⁶ bottle full of water which acted as a magnifier. ●

In Ireland, as throughout Atlantic Europe, the dresser ranks³⁵² as the most important and elaborate piece of furniture in the kitchen, and its position is prescribed by custom. It stands³⁵³ either against the side wall or against the partition between kitchen and bedroom. Since this partition is of no great antiquity we can be sure that the original place of the dresser was against the side-wall and that it has developed from, and taken the place of, shelves built into or attached to the side-wall. In part of Ulster it is referred to as 'the shelf'. I have already mentioned the tiers of stone shelves set in the wall which are preserved in the deserted houses of the Slievemore cluster on Achill Island. It is believed that the fashion of open crockery shelves was diffused from the court sideboards of the later Middle Ages in France and England, and it may be surmised that the wooden dresser was readily accepted in Celtic lands to replace wall shelves, from Elizabethan times on. The adoption of delft and tea-drinking in the eighteenth century no doubt accelerated the spread of the dresser, which had become, by that time, an essential part of Irish kitchen furniture (Plate 1). The corner-cupboard, evolving in much the same way from corner-shelves, is another article of furniture with a north-west European distribution. Similarly the coffer or store-chest spread through western Europe from the later Middle Ages onwards, replacing skin, straw, hollowed wood, or basket-work containers.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

• 416
286

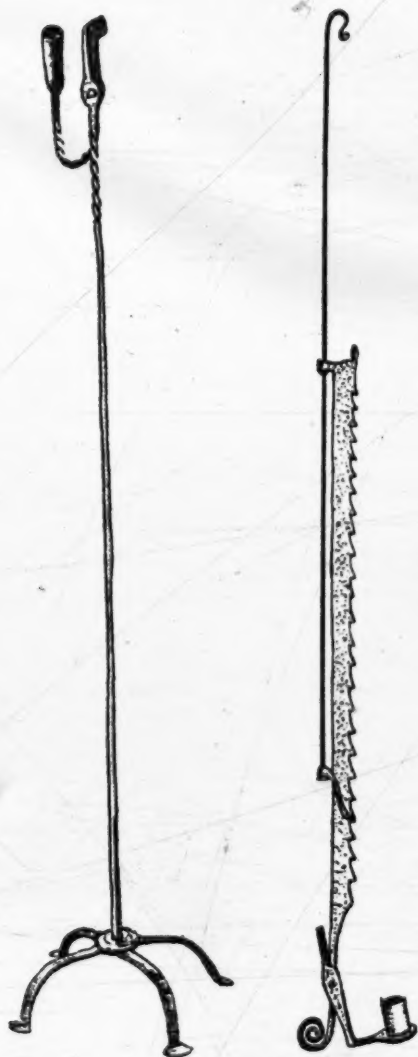


FIG. 28. Weavers' light-holders, Co. Armagh. Height, 3 ft.